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Communication in destination marketing Case study: Tallinn European Capital of Culture 2011

Ott Vatter*

MA candidate, Baltic Film and Media School, Narva Rd 27, 10120, Tallinn Estonia

Abstract

The purpose of this paper was to research the role of communication in destination marketing by analyzing the destination marketing campaign of Tallinn European Capital of Culture 2011. The research had a practical focus on determining the goals, if and how were they reached. In addition, attention was paid towards the obstacles of implementing the strategies. The research was conducted by qualitative in-depth interviews with 5 Tallinn 2011 specialists in order to map their opinions, feelings and experiences about communication as a part of destination marketing. The results showed that the destination marketing of Tallinn 2011 would have been unsuccessful without communication. Despite of unforeseen events and political communication, the team of Tallinn 2011 was able to play a decisive role in the destination marketing campaign of TECoC, promoting the city successfully with the most cost-effective ways possible. In its endeavour to prove the willingness of being a European worthy Culture Capital, it can be said that the common practice of communication and destination marketing was contradicted in the sense that unrealistic promises were communicated to target audiences but as the interviews showed, it was the ramification of series of unforeseen events and cannot in any way be blamed on the team of Tallinn 2011.

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1. Introduction

Each year, the European Commission chooses two cities to represent the European Capital of Culture. The title dates back to 1985 and the original name was European City of Culture. Melina Mercouri, the Greek Minister of Culture at that time believed that culture was not given enough attention and it was her initiative to bring Europeans closer together by highlighting the richness and diversity of European cultures and raising awareness of their common history and values. According to Mercouri, the process of preparing a European Capital of Culture can be an opportunity for the city to generate considerable cultural, social and economic

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: o.vatter@gmail.com

benefits, it can change the city's image, raise its visibility and profile on an international scale. Today, more than 40 cities have been designated as Capitals of Culture and a 2004 European Commission (Ex-post Evaluation of 2011 European Capitals of Culture) study demonstrated that the choice of European Capital of Culture served as a catalyst for the cultural development and the transformation of the city. This demonstrates the scale of impact the title has on a city and in return challenges to consider the responsibility it faces. Our research aims to elaborate the role of communication in a destination marketing campaign with the example of Tallinn European Capital of Culture 2011. The research problem can be raised as having very limited financial possibilities to implement successful destination marketing. The solution for this research problem can be considered cost-effective communication as a part of the destination marketing campaign.

Socially this research will help to gain experience on how Tallinn was depicted to the rest of the world. What were our unique selling points, destination marketing goals and to what scale were they achieved. This is important because one is able to look, assess and analyze the campaign through the eyes of a foreigner, which provides a more precise understanding of the image of Tallinn 2011. This research will academically contribute to the social sciences sphere of comprehending ethical and moral practices of communication and destination marketing adding to the existing literature (see in the end after the references). The aim is to find out to what extent it is acceptable to paint a better picture and from what point onwards can overly ambitious promises be considered as deception.

With this research the author expects to discover reasons why and how was communication used in destination marketing, did it serve its purpose and what could have been improved. The author also expects to find if common practices of communication and destination marketing were contradicted with overly ambitious promises.

This research gives a practical overview of communication as a part of a destination marketing campaign; it demonstrates examples of implementing creative communication with a limited budget and also illustrates challenging political communication situations.

2. Culture, communication and marketing

Communication in given context is the development and implementation of communication strategies before, during and after applying for TECoC. The purpose of communication is to notify target groups, shape and influence opinions to achieve wanted behaviour. Also to attract different target groups to the process of creating and communicating the Tallinn European Capital of Culture 2011 year followed by interest and attendance to events.

Destination marketing in given context refers to the marketing strategy that focuses on creating the image for Tallinn. It is a proactive, strategic, visitor-centred approach to the economic and cultural development of a location, which balances and integrates the interests of visitors, service providers, and the community (Destination Marketing Association International 2008).

Cultural tourism is a genre of special interest tourism based on the search for and participation in new and deep cultural experiences, whether aesthetic, intellectual, emotional, or psychological (Stebbins 1996).

In given context this incorporates different cultural forms, including museums, galleries, festivals, architecture, historic sites, artistic performances and also any experience that brings together cultures with the purpose of contact.

Branding means building an offering from a known source. The intangible value proposition is made physical by an offering, which can be a combination of products, services, information and experiences (Rainisto 2003). These include museums, cultural sites and the travel experiences the city's visitors have. The physical value that Rainisto is talking about, could in this case be the events during Tallinn 2011.

Culture is one the most difficult terms in social science. Culture can be defined through collectivity, planned or spontaneous symbolic form of expression. Maybe the most broad and important distinction of culture is

communication, because cultures could not develop, maintain or expand and succeed without communication (McQuail 2003). In given context cultural marketing refers to “beaux-arts” like theatre, concerts, music and heritage culture. The essence of marketing is a process of exchange. Exchanging product for money or cultural experience for target groups time and money.

“Besides products and services, there are other marketing objects: people, ideas, places, experiences and organizations” (Kotler 2007). Similar methods can be used for marketing objects like: cultural events and cities. B. Kolb (2006) describes destination marketing as offering a trade for the individual. The consumer spends time and money in the city and in return gains an experience.

Kolb (2006) claims that it is important for the city not to focus on just promotion but mainly on creating content. If a tourist is beguiled to a city and an insufficient program is offered, the result is unfortunate for both. The tourist will receive a negative experience, causing him to never return and the city will lose its potential revenue in the future.

Cultural tourism brings along important economical opportunities for the city. Being ready for tourists and offering interesting and pleasant environment, there is a possibility that information spreads through independent channels and the reputation grows. This can in turn beguile new organizations, habitants that create extra income for the city. Thus, development of cultural tourism is not only a cost but a prerequisite for various ways of making profit (Kolb 2006). The development of cultural tourism is an on going process. If neglected, the threat of people and businesses leaving, flow of tourists decreasing is considerable, economical loss is substantial. Thus it is important to promote and support the cultural sphere.

The communication of ECoC offers great possibilities but there are also signs of hazard. When political communication comes to play and unrealistic promises are made in order to seem a more appealing location. The latter can set the whole project in danger, which don't allow culture creators to implement their full potential and/or create false expectations in visitors.

3. Tallinn Capital of Culture

Tallinn has a long and diverse cultural heritage, having become a city in the 13th century and flourishing during the Middle Ages as a member of the Hanseatic League. More recently, the city played a very significant role in the "Singing Revolution" of 1987-1991. This can be considered as one of the reasons for the independence of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania from the Soviet Union. The Estonian Song Festival ("Laulupidu") was the first in series of peaceful protests and mass demonstrations of Estonian national identity that were at the heart of the independence movement (European Commission 2011).

Today, Tallinn is Estonia's capital and its largest city with a population of just over 400,000 people, of which one-third is of Russian ethnicity. As well as being the administrative and financial centre of the country, it has a well-developed ICT infrastructure and information technology sector and is widely recognised for ICT applications for the public services. In the 1990s and early 2000s, Tallinn, like the rest of Estonia, experienced rapid development and falling unemployment. However, Tallinn was hard hit by the economic crisis of 2008 as the economy contracted and unemployment trebled. Whilst the local and national economies recovered in 2010, public budgets at all levels remained constrained as the government introduced tough austerity measures to ensure that government debt and public deficits would satisfy the “Maastricht criteria”^{*} and allow Estonia to adopt the Euro in 2011 (European Commission 2011).

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4. The cultural sector

One of Tallinn's key cultural assets is its medieval old town, which is recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and which has been at the heart of efforts to attract tourists to the city. Indeed, the Tallinn 2030 Strategy includes strategic measures to sustain the city's historic and cultural heritage as a means of promoting cultural tourism to the city. Similarly, the Baltic Cultural Tourism Policy has emphasised the active preservation of cultural resources, heritage, traditions and values as a means of creating tourist value.

The City Government's Development Plan of Tallinn 2009-27 has similarly prioritized the development of cultural tourism. The Plan has also stated an intention to attract tourists to other parts of the city through "developing the city as a complete cultural product", including through "opening the old town and city centre to the sea". Foreign tourists visits to/stays in Tallinn gradually increased in the years to 2008 but fell significantly in 2009 before recovering in 2010. In contrast, Tallinn tended to decline as a destination for visitors from other parts of Estonia in the years before 2011 (European Commission 2011).

5. The European dimension

In 2004 Estonia was given the right to be nominated as European Culture Capital 2011. In order to select its nomination, the Ministry of Culture decided to operate a national competition with two rounds. The first round of applications in 2005 were from the towns Haapsalu, Pärnu, Rakvere, Tallinn and Tartu. Tallinn and Tartu were invited to proceed to the second round, in which Tallinn was ultimately successful.

Tallinn's application was initially based around the theme of "folklore and fairytales". It stated that the overall mission of its ECoC would be to "create a cultural event that is supported on every level by its urban community, proving in the process that a small society built on a strong cultural foundation can be as much a success as that of larger nations". This cultural event would help the city to "return to the European cultural map", form a new European identity and further integrate the Estonian population into the EU. At the same time, the ECoC was intended to project a new and better image for Tallinn; instead of being viewed as merely as a post-communist city, the intention was for Tallinn to be viewed as a safe, clean and hi-tech Nordic city capable of hosting EU institutions and international events. This image was to be based around a hi-tech living and working environment within a city that is both medieval and contemporary. It also incorporated a social dimension, by emphasising the importance of providing educational opportunities and enhancing social coherence.

In pursuit of this overall vision, Tallinn's application stated a number of objectives, as presented in the table below. From these objectives, we see that the "City and Citizens dimension" featured through involving citizens in culture and through developing the city's cultural infrastructure and creative economy. The "European dimension" featured primarily through transnational cultural co-operation and the promotion of tourism.

Table. 1 Original objectives of Tallinn 2011

Objectives proposed in the original application
Establishing an urban environment that focuses on furthering the development of the citizens' creative activity and initiative, as well as allocating infrastructure and investments to accommodate the increasing cultural needs of its citizenry
Creating guidelines for a creative economy that integrates with Tallinn's business community and becomes a part of the city's overall trademark
Promoting cultural communication between Estonia's arts community and that of other nations in Europe, developing new projects and co-operation in order to make Tallinn an open, multicultural city, while building the finance and development plans for existing and future public events.
Ensuring Tallinn's recognition as an essential and important market and an attractive destination for cultural tourists.

(European Commission 2011)

Tallinn's application set out an approach that represented something genuinely new and additional to the city's cultural life. It emphasised equal participation for established institutions and for independent cultural operators, new use of public spaces and industrial buildings as cultural venues, transnational co- operation, openness to project ideas from citizens or individual cultural operators, innovative use of ICT and specific attention provision for people with special needs.

Cultural activities were also to be complemented by a programme of infrastructure investments worth €325m. These would include improvements to existing facilities, such as the City Concert Hall (Linnahall) and the Sakala Centre (Sakala Keskus), as well as the creation of new facilities, for example, through the creation of the Culture Cauldron (Kultuurikatel) in former industrial premises. Small-scale developments were to include the Kilometre of culture (Kultuurikilomeeter) – using a former industrial area as a public space for cultural events and installations (European Commission 2011).

The application of Tallinn stated a commitment to developing an evaluation system "so that the city will have a constant overview of this ongoing process (evaluating Tallinn's infrastructure, creative economy, cultural creativity and exchange, tourism and overall image". It also identified a number of indicators to be used in its monitoring and evaluation of the achievements of the title year. However, in practice it appears that the monitoring and evaluation was much less extensive than originally planned and information was not gathered against these indicators (European Commission 2011).

The basis of empirical analysis was in-depth qualitative interviews with specialists who were involved with European Capital of Culture (see Appendix A for interview questions). These included members of staff who were well informed from the very beginning of the first application, until the end of the culture year. The selection of interviewees was intentionally so that diverse opinions and attitudes of varied people would come up to form a wholesome understanding of the topic.

6. Findings and discussion

The role of communication in the TECoC destination marketing campaign cannot be underestimated. As it turned out, it was the most cost-efficient and effective means of implementing destination marketing when experiencing serious budget constraints, as was the case with Tallinn 2011. It was the first time to create such a big project with connected messages, to market a city and thanks to Tallinn being the capital, market the whole country. Thus it is understandable that the Tallinn 2011 team was under great pressure to paint an internationally positive picture. According to the interviews, looking back it can be said that the role of communication was in some way to make things look better and bigger than they actually were. This was mainly because the application

was drafted in the pre-crisis period, though some interviewees claimed they were intentionally asked to portray a better image of Tallinn. The use of personal approach guaranteed significant publications in the international media that would have been impossible to achieve with traditional destination marketing tools.

All of the interviewees agreed that the plans in the original application were overly ambitious. Some even went as far as to saying that they were aware at the time of the application that some of these plans would never take place. The question of ethics arises because in a situation where the members of the Foundation 2011 were well aware that the given promises were unrealistic; was it really ethical to continue communicating them to target audiences?

According to the European Commission survey, only 36% of operators believed that the cultural infrastructure of Tallinn improved as a result of the TECoC, the majority believed that such improvements were modest. Of course it must be stressed that the Tallinn 2011 campaign and preparations coincided with the economic crisis, nearly half of the original budget was cut and it is understandable that there were fewer achievements than planned. Looking back, the original application was over-ambitious and would have probably needed considerable revision and reduction, even in a more favourable context. However, those developing and implementing the TECoC are not to blame for the dispute between City and State and the reduction in the budget.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, in its endeavor to prove the willingness of being a European worthy Culture Capital, the common practice of communication and destination marketing was contradicted in the sense that unrealistic promises were communicated to target audiences but it was the ramification of series of unforeseen events and cannot in any way be blamed on the team of Tallinn 2011.

Economic, political, social and psychological parameters may contribute to the presentation of the identity of a place since places need to differentiate themselves from each other to assert their unique and distinctive characteristics (Kavoura, 2013; Kavoura and Katsoni, 2013) in an attempt to satisfy tourists and visitors and project the distinct characteristics of a place whether these are museums, heritage sites etc. Nevertheless, a critical approach towards the implementation of communication activities is necessary as literature has shown (Kavoura and Bitsani, 2013). Kolb (2006) claimed that if a tourist is beguiled to a city and an insufficient program is offered, the result is unfortunate for both. The tourist will receive a negative experience, causing him to never return and the city will lose its potential revenue in the future.

Cities and places have a lot to offer to increase the attractiveness provided that the initiation and the implementation of activities are well organized and not unrealistic promises are communicated.

Professionally this research will contribute to the knowledge of understanding the importance of communication in destination marketing. What kind of role does it have and how it can be implemented more efficiently in future destination marketing campaigns.

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Appendix A. Qualitative interview questions

- Please name three most important keywords that you associate with Tallinn European Capital of Culture 2011?
- How were you involved with Tallinn European Capital of Culture 2011?
- How would you define and understand the term destination marketing?
- What do you think of the communication strategy of Tallinn European Capital of Culture as a part of the destination marketing campaign?
- In your opinion how did the exauguration of Mikko Fritze influence the communication strategy?
- How would you compare the program upon applying for European Capital of Culture and the program that actually took place?
- Would you comment upon the renovation plans when applying for European Capital of Culture: Sakala Centre, Linnahall, Linnateater, Kultuurikatel?
- How did the communication strategy change due to the reduction of the budget and the overall program?
- Would you say that in its endeavor to prove the willingness of being a European worthy Culture Capital, unrealistic promises were made?
- Would you consider Tallinn European Capital of Culture a successful destination marketing project?
- Would you have done something different? What exactly?